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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002497

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SUBJECT: PRT JALALABAD: NANGARHAR PROVINCE SIX MONTH
ASSESSMENT

REF: KABUL 515

Classified By: Political Counselor Sara Rosenberry for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Nangarhar's strategic location on the Pakistan Border and relative economic prosperity make it an important indicator of progress in Afghanistan. Recent set-backs in security and an increase in poppy production over the last six months are disappointing. ISAF and CF forces have intensified efforts to reverse the trend of increasing terrorist attacks and insurgent incursions, but have also been involved in several incidents of civilian casualties. The lack of electrical power continues to be a stumbling block to development. Governor Sherzai remains powerful, but continues to shuffle local officials in an attempt to build a team he is comfortable with. The inability of the central government to complete projects undermines its credibility in the province. The planned closure of Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan will increase the number of returnees seeking shelter and employment in Nangarhar. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

2. (SBU) Nangarhar province is the most densely populated province in Afghanistan. Its capital city of Jalalabad is the cultural, political, and economic center of the eastern region, with a population (500,000) greater than many Afghan provinces. Dominated by the fertile Kabul River valley, the province's mild climate allows farmers to enjoy a long growing season, making Nangarhar a major source of produce. A large volume of Pakistani imports come through Jalalabad's Torkham Gate border crossing.

SECURITY: RESPONSES TO THE DETERIORATING SITUATION

3. (C) Security has deteriorated in Nangarhar province over the past six months with an increasing number of IED's and suicide attacks. There has been an increase in reports of Taliban crossing from Pakistan through the Tora Bora

Mountains on Nangarhar,s southern border, and infiltration of villages and towns in the southern districts. In response, ISAF and Coalition Forces in Regional Command East (RC East) have more than doubled this past February. Troop levels are planned to increase again soon when an infantry battalion arrives to temporarily take responsibility of the six western districts of Nangarhar. TF Raptor and the infantry battalion plan to build new forward operating bases in this area as well as to work on border control, the counter narcotics campaign, and capacity building of the Afghan National Security Forces.

¶4. (SBU) Afghan security force development nevertheless is making progress. Between April and June 2007, 1,586 new Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) recruits from the four N2KL provinces (Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar, and Lagman) successfully completed the two-week training sessions at the Regional Training Center outside Jalalabad. On June 12, the RTC began training instructors who will conduct sustainment training for the new ANAP at the various Police Headquarters. Initial reports from the districts are positive. Those ANAP who successfully complete their one-year contract, complete sustainment training, and receive positive recommendations from their police chief, will have the chance to become full-time ANP.

¶5. (C) Reports of civilian casualties have made it difficult to keep the spotlight on positive developments. In March, a convoy of newly arrived Marine Special Forces was hit by an IED in the Markoh Bazaar areas east of Jalalabad, and reportedly responded to the perceived ambush with firing that killed 20 civilians and wounded 50 others. The fallout -- demonstrations, strikes, a critical UN report, an ongoing

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Navy investigation, and a solatia ceremony to honor the wounded and dead -- received repeated front-page coverage in international media. A night raid on a suspected bomb-making compound in the same area (killing two young women and injured two others) led to further demonstrations. Soldiers evacuated two injured women to Bagram Airbase for medical treatment without male relatives accompanying them, leading to calls from local Afgans to let the women die rather than be dishonored. In June, seven policemen from Unit 03, which works closely with the Coalition, were killed during an incident preceding a night raid in the Khogyani district.

ECONOMY: POPPY PRODUCTION SOARS, ENERGY LAGS

¶6. (SBU) The most significant factor in the Nangarhar economy in the past six months was the huge increase in poppy production. Early, unofficial, information from both UNODC and the Ministry of Interior suggest that Nangarhar,s poppy cultivation may increase four-fold this year, approaching 20,000 hectares. The increase was especially evident in March and April when poppy fields seemed to cover the province in spite of the governor,s aggressive anti-planting campaign last fall and his enthusiastic but inadequate eradication campaign during the growing season. An increase in local opium processing complements the increase in poppy production. Governor Sherzai has declared that he supports both spraying and harsher punishments for those who grow poppy next year. The PRT has emphasized the importance of the counter-narcotics campaign targeting not only farmers and their fields, but also those who buy, process, and transport the opium.

¶7. (SBU) Nangarhar's many NGOs and USAID's Alternative Development Program have effectively advanced economic development in sectors such as agricultural innovation and road construction. The Provincial Development Committee (PDC) has yet to produce a consensus plan for the province, but lack of electrical power is a clear priority. USAID has allocated funding for the renovation of the Russian built Darunta Dam, currently the only source of electricity for

Nangarhar aside from small, private generators. This project remains in the planning stages, however, and once complete will only slightly increase the dam's 1963 generation capacity, sufficient power for 40,000 Jalalabad inhabitants.

POLITICAL: SHIFTING OFFICIALS, UNFINISHED PROJECTS

18. (SBU) Governor Sherzai continues to wield considerable power despite his inability to deliver on development or reduce poppy production. He continued in his steadfast support for Coalition forces, even through the difficult days following the Markoh Bazaar incident. Governor Sherzai's strength -- and weakness -- is his willingness to assert his authority. He often fires, hires, and moves appointees as he sees fit, increasing accountability and protecting his authority, but also making continuity difficult.

19. (SBU) Seven unfinished District Centers and Police Headquarters being built by the Afghanistan Stabilization Program (ASP) are local symbols of central government ineffectiveness in the province. Like elsewhere in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Stabilization Program (ASP) in Nangarhar has been unable to complete projects, leaving unfinished buildings to deteriorate. In contrast, PRT-funded district centers have averaged six months from ground breaking to ribbon cutting. New District Communication Centers initially funded by USAID and now run by Afghan Telecom -- each with two full time employees, telephones, and computers connected to the internet -- seem to have myriad problems, including lack of knowledge about how to operate the equipment.

110. (SBU) Attorney General Sabit,s highly publicized investigations into corruption in Nangarhar last December ultimately led to only a few arrests and the quick release of

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many suspects. The exercise did send a message, however, and there does seem to be a decrease in corruption and bribery. The threat of further investigations and the efforts of new ANP chief General Sayeed Abdul Ghafour and new ABP chief Colonel Akrom Basher Yar also helps. Tolls at the Torkham Gate border crossing led to a transit strike for several weeks in April to protest the seemingly uncontrolled collection of illegal taxes by multiple authorities. The strike ended with the Afghan Government promising efforts to eliminate illegal taxes and to simplify the system, which seems to have improved the situation.

SOCIAL: RETURNEE INFLUX EXPECTED, UFOCUSSED PDC

111. (SBU) Pakistan,s plans to close four Afghan refugee camps this year will increasingly affect Nangarhar, as a large percentage of returnees originate from the province. The expected returns will not be as high as the initial announcements of 800,000 per year for three years, but the number will be significant, including many born in Pakistan who have never lived in Afghanistan. There are three returnee camps in Nangarhar, the largest being the GOA,s land allocation site at Sheik Mesri; UNCR, OFDA, the PRT, and many other organizations are working to prepare for the influx.

112. (SBU) The Provincial Development Committee (PDC) has made little progress in the past six months. Meetings generally involve members reading lists of projects that they want the international community to fund. NGOs are working with with Community Development Councils (CDCs), and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) is holding seminars in each district in an attempt to feed information into the Provincial Development Plan (PDP) by its the August deadline. Various Technical Working Groups and district officials seem to be discussing the prioritization of needs, but the PDC still is not showing initiative.

